**Vale of Allen Parish Council**

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| **Guidance Note** | **Planning, Policies, Decisions etc** |
| **Date** | **November 2023** |
| **Produced by** | **Ian Hanstead, Parish Clerk** |

Parish Council councillors need to be fully aware of their responsibilities. Having been elected to a public representative status, there is an implied condition that you are a councillor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – until you step down.

Members of the public, aware of your role as councillor, will pay particular attention to your viewpoints and opinions concerning local, county and national issues. They are likely to consider any of your comments as representing the views of the Parish Council. For example, if you are discussing matters such as:

* Planning applications
* Highway maintenance
* Rubbish/recycling
* Dorset Council actions
* Vale of Allen Parish Council policies
* Etc

you must be very wary and aware of what you say and do as your comments and/or actions may be construed incorrectly.

You should avoid expressing your personal opinion (even if you are personally for or against an issue) and remain neutral, stating only the facts as known. There is no shame in ‘sitting on the fence’ or appearing to be indecisive.

A good example can be illustrated in a planning issue:

There is a planning application to build new homes in your neighbourhood. Some members of the public will be for this, others against. You may have a personal view, but that must not be aired during casual discussion. You can air both your own views and those of your neighbours/parishioners during a council meeting (these will help decision-making) but sharing an isolated, personal viewpoint publicly can cause irreparable damage to the planning process. In planning terms, this is known as ‘pre-determination’. Members of the public, organisations or developers can refer to your comments. Such comments have been known to over-ride council decisions and place councillors at all levels in very difficult positions. This causes embarrassment, affects local democracy credibility and, if an appeal upheld, could lead to Maladministration – a serious offence.

When in a meeting you identify a conflict in personal interest you are reminded of ‘Declaration of Interest’. This must be stated to the Chairman and Parish Clerk before the item discussed. You may be allowed to participate in the debate following this but will have to leave the room should a vote be undertaken.

The message is therefore – stick to the facts:

**F – F**ull time commitment

**A – A**void personal opinion

**C – C**arefully consider your comments

**T –** **T**alk can cause trouble

**S –** **S**tick to the seven principles of public life.

Councillors need to be very self-disciplined in this litigious age.

Agreed by committee: 7 November 2023

Review date: Nov 2029